

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, PINT, GH
SUBJ: OPPOSITION MOVEMENT WILL NOT BE BANNED

REF: ACCRA 1200

1. IN A FEBRUARY 13 INTERVIEW WITH GHANA BROADCASTING CORPORATION (TEXT CARRIED IN FEBRUARY 15 DAILY GRAPHIC), HEAD OF STATE ACHEAMPONG MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS (ALL QUOTATIONS ARE FROM HIM):

2. PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE WILL NOT BE BANNED. "WE WANT EVERYBODY TO BE FREE TO BELONG TO ANY MOVEMENT SO WE WON'T PROSCRIBE IT AND WE WILL NOT LISTEN TO THE ADVICE OF OUR SUPPORTERS TO ARREST THE LEADERS. ...AT THE MOMENT, IF YOU TAKE ANY ACTION AGAINST ANY OF THEM, IT MAY BE MISCONSTRUED AND THIS IS WHAT WE WANT TO AVOID. THEY ARE FREE TO HOLD RALLIES."

3. HOWEVER, MOVEMENT IS GOING TO FIND IT HARD TO GET POLICE PERMITS NEEDED FOR RALLIES. ACHEAMPONG NOTED THAT IF POLICE DO NOT GIVE PERMITS, "THE REASON MAY BE THIS: SOME OF THE MEMBERS (OF THE MOVEMENT) LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAVE SO ANTAGONIZED CERTAIN PEOPLE ... THAT THEY MAY OVERREACT AND IT IS THE DUTY OF THE POLICE TO SAFEGUARD THE LIVES OF THE INDIVIDUALS." THUS MOVEMENT CANNOT BLAME ACHEAMPONG IF PERMITS ARE NOT ISSUED SINCE THAT RESPONSIBILITY RESTS ENTIRELY WITH THE POLICE: "THE POLICE WOULD WANT TO BE VERY SURE THAT WHEN THEY GRANT THE PERMIT THERE IS NOT GOING TO BE ANY BLOODSHED OR

ANY CONFUSION, BUT DEFINITELY GOVERNMENT IS NOT STOPPING THEM."

4. NEVERTHELESS, MOVEMENT WILL BE PERMITTED AT LEAST SOME LIMITED OPERATIONS: IF MOVEMENT LEADERS ARE "VERY GENUINE, WHAT THEY CAN DO IS TO ORGANIZE ... PRESS

CONFERENCES EITHER IN THEIR OFFICES" OR IN PLACES WHERE LARGE CROWDS WILL NOT GATHER. "THE GOVERNMENT DEFINITELY WILL NOT STOP THEM ... FROM HOLDING PRESS CONFERENCES BUT TO GO TO THE PUBLIC AND HOLD A RALLY, WE CAN'T DEFINITELY ENSURE THE SAFETY OF ALL THOSE WHO COME TO LISTEN."

5. NEWSPAPERS ARE NOT CENSORED AND ARE FREE TO PUBLISH DISSENTING VIEWS ON UNION GOVERNMENT. BUT THERE IS A CATCH-22: "YOU TALK FOR OR AGAINST THE UNION GOVERNMENT. DON'T BRING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT INTO THE UNION GOVERNMENT DISCUSSION. WE ARE NOT THE UNION GOVERNMENT". LATER IN THE INTERVIEW, ACHEAMPONG AMPLIFIED HIS POINT: PEOPLE "ARE ALLOWED TO TALK TO ATTACH THE GOVERNMENT ... I THINK (MOVEMENT LEADERS) ARE WRONG IN USING THE UNION GOVERNMENT CONCEPT TO INCITE THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT."

6. COMMENT: ACHEAMPONG'S DECISION NOT TO BAN OPPOSITION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TION MOVEMENT IS PROBABLY DUE TO TWO FACTORS. FIRST, HE ALMOST CERTAINLY BELIEVES THAT THIS WOULD INCREASE PUBLIC INTEREST IN AND SYMPATHY WITH THE MOVEMENT: POLICY WOULD THUS BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. SECOND, HE SEEMS TO HAVE CONCLUDED THAT MOVEMENT'S INITIAL SUCCESSES ARE ONLY FLEETING AND THAT IT IS NOT LIKELY TO POSE A SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OR TO HIS CHERISHED UNION GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL. FOR THIS REASON, HE CAN AFFORD TO LET MOVEMENT CONTINUE.

7. OUR OWN FEELING IS THAT MOVEMENT'S DECISION TO CANCEL FEBRUARY 10 RALLY IN DOWNTOWN ACCRA (REFTEL) AVERTED BLOODSHED BUT MAY HAVE PROVED COSTLY IN TERMS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT. IN ABSENCE OF MASS RALLIES, MOVEMENT HAS FEW WAYS OF MAKING ITS PRESENCE FELT ON A NATION-WIDE BASIS. EVEN IF MOVEMENT IS NOW ALLOWED TO HOLD SMALL PRESS CONFERENCES, THE ODDS ARE THAT IT WILL FAIL TO ACHIEVE ITS GOAL OF TURNING OUT A MASSIVE "NO" VOTE ON UNION GOVERNMENT AT MARCH 30 REFERENDUM. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE SINCE THE GHANAIA MEDIA, THE GREAT BULK OF WHICH IS GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED, IS CLEARLY NOT GOING TO GIVE ANY FAVORABLE PUBLICITY TO THE

MOVEMENT. SMITH

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